FIRST FIREMAN AND LOOKOUT TRAINING SCHOOL HELD IN FOREST SERVICE

by

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This is a recording of the first firemen's and lookouts' training school ever held in the Forest Service. At the time the school was held, the fire chief on the Cabinet Forest made this claim, and it was not refuted from any place throughout the Service.

There was a total in attendance at this school of approximately 40, including the teachers. The school was the brainchild of Harry Lee Baker, who was the supervisor at the time. Baker delivered an orientation lecture and was present to supervise all of the activities during the tenure of the school which lasted for 4 days, June 20 through June 23, 1921.

Most of the lectures were delivered by Jack Bowen, who was fire chief at the time; Ben Saint, the District Ranger at Noxon, and Neil Eplin, Ranger-at-large on the Forest. I gave lectures on the use of the compass. The rest of the permanent personnel on the Forest assisted in the classes in and around the Ranger Station as well as the field tests.

Howard Larson, the District Ranger, was the host for the meeting, and performed in an excellent manner. Howard was a natural-born law officer. Six or seven years after the school was held, Howard resigned and successfully ran for the sheriff's position of Sanders County. After serving for several hitches as the sheriff, he became the game warden for the Montana Game Commission and retired from that position at Butte, Montana. He now resides a short distance out of Butte on a dude ranch.

My diary gives some interesting sidelights on the equipment we were limited to in those days. On June 18, which was Saturday, my diary states "Our truck transport was limited to an old Denby truck of WW I vintage." On June 15, I listed, "We gave the truck a complete overhauling today during the morning, filled the grease cups, checked the tires." Checked the tires sounds rather funny. It had dual rear tires, and they were hard tires. A ride in the Denby truck felt like going down a logging corduroy at high speed; it was so rough. Then, of course, we had to provide for some entertainment after the sessions were over as well as for the field exercises.

My diary on June 18, which was Sunday, reads "Left the truck at the station with Bowen and Eplin at 6:30 a.m. Went up Trout Creek to

Minton Creek. Placed two tent tarps as imaginary fires, one at Minton Creek drainage and the other in Dry Creek drainage. These fires had an azimuth reading from Mt. Hope, which was right behind the Ranger Station, of 272 and 267, respectively."

In the evening, I stated that we went to Noxon at night and returned. That was a memorable trip. Handsome Harry Ransom, from Thompson River District and I went to Noxon to get some refreshments of "Volstead origin"--Volstead, he was the legislator who authored the prohibition amendment to the Constitution. "King Bootlegger" in the Noxon area, so I had been informed by Ranger Ben Saint, was one "Strawberry" Bartholomew, from whom we purchased a gallon of the best moonshine, or at least supposed to be the best moonshine, that was being manufactured in Sanders County at that time.

Our transportation consisted of a Mudge speeder. As I recall, it had the small box on top and arrangements for seating at least two people and was powered by a gasoline engine.

Before our departure from Noxon we had checked with the station agent about the train schedules and thought we had clearance, but we didn't. We were rounding the curves at Furlong which is now the site of the Noxon Dam. We heard a train to the west of us, whistling for the curves. We stopped our Mudge in about 25 yards; we must have dynamited the brakes and jumped off simultaneously. We had the moonshine cached in a small box under the seat. As I recall we didn't have any padding around it. But we got the Mudge, one on each end of it, and tipped her right over off the tracks and down the sideslope. Both of us went right along with it, and swoosh, the train went past. We thought we were ruined, moonshine and all, but we got the Mudge back on the track, it worked, and we very gingerly opened the lid of the box and there was the gallon of moon intact.

So we proceeded on our way. We had our refreshments for the Smokechaser Ball that had been advertised up and down the valley, at the recreation hall above Hurtt's store in Trout Creek. Incidentally, this Smokechaser's Ball was another first. To my knowledge, it was the first Smokechaser's Ball ever advertised and held in the Forest Service.

Another entry in my diary of June 23, states that "At noon we left for the Trout Creek store via truck with Frank Hagel and Paul Fisher. We made a bar and other preparations at the hall for the dance." Only coffee and coke and other soft drinks were served at the bar even if these were the roaring 20's. The field tests were a pretty

good test of a man's ability to find a fire on a given azimuth from a certain lookout.

On June 21, the diary records--took one man to starting point below the lookout, started 16 men off for the fire at intervals of 20 minutes by noon. The next day, June 22, 17 men were started at the same point. Out of the 33 men who took this portion of the test, I think only one was a Forest school student, and none were Forest school graduates; however, what they lacked in formal schooling was offset by the fact that most of them were excellent woodsmen and very familiar with the mountains.

One character will always remain in my memory--Henry Sales, from the Thompson River District. In the early days, the Sales brothers had homesteaded in that area and were, at the time the school was held, quite prominent cattle ranchers in that part of the country. They had a reputation for being the best cougar hunters in western Montana. Henry sales, who was at the school as a smokechaser, told me that he had personally been in on the kill of 160 cougars up to that time, Henry wasn't a very literate individual.

During the test of the previous day, Henry confidentially told me he hadn't had a day of formal schooling in his life, and he had a little difficulty in signing his name. I noticed him setting at the table chewing his pencil. I asked him, "Henry, how come you aren't writing it down?" He said, "Oh hell, I can't write it but I can tell ya." I said, "You give me that pencil, Henry, and you tell me what the answers are to these questions and I'll write it down for ya." I did, and Henry rated a real good mark on the written exam. After that, I had some doubts about his capacity to transform azimuth readings into compass readings. However, my fears were groundless. Henry was among the first five back from the face of the theoretical smoke. How he did it, he never would tell us. I think in crossing over the ridge he found the tracks of the horses we had used to take in the outfit to set up the tarps and followed them right in. He was an excellent tracker.

The one and only forestry school student at this school never did reach the theoretical fire. He interpreted his azimuth to a compass reading in the wrong or opposite quadrant. He must have had a bit of "Wrong-Way Corrigan" in him. Then, I think he felt a bit upset being the only forestry school student in the crowd, with the exception of Supervisor Baker and myself. I think he must have realized, also, like the rest of us technical men, that we were in an era in the Service when practical education in woodsmanship and mountaineering meant a good deal more than book larnin'.

The Smokechaser Ball came off with a bang the last night of the school. Since it was during the Volstead days, the bar contained only coffee and coke. Any other refreshments were cached outside. To my knowledge, the Smokechaser Ball was held for several years on the Cabinet Forest because it was still being held when I left there in 1925.

Another memorable event of this smokechaser school was a rather monumental fiscal irregularity in the accounting division of the Regional Office. On the second night of the training school, Supervisor Baker called us into a bedroom of the old station. With a very serious look on his face, he informed us that the Regional Forester had just told him over the phone that Fiscal Agent Urbanowitz had been arrested and charged with embezzlement of $180,000 of Government funds. Much of the money, I think, came from the Northern Pacific cooperative fund. This was bad news for all of us as Urbanowitz was very well thought of throughout the entire Region. Even in those days of minimum fiscal accounting, Urbanowitz and his office were always helpful to the field forces. I guess he just came to the fork of the road and took the wrong fork. He pleaded guilty to the charge and served his time and reentered civilian life as an employee of Brown & Bigelow, an advertising firm in Minneapolis. He did very well with them until his retirement. Many of the boys stopped off in Minneapolis to have a chat with "Bannie," if they had business back in that part of the country.

I have already furnished you with pictures of the overhead teaching staff and some of the trainees.[1/] There is also an enlargement showing the entire complement of station buildings, and the background also includes three old Model-T cars parked out in front by the hitch rail.

I think the most outstanding part of this picture is the mountainside back of the station site which has been burned over in 1910. It is now a splendid young forest, and I believe we should have a picture taken from the same location as I took this picture 50 years ago as a contrast.[2/] We might even have one duded up special to send to Senator McGee of Wyoming. He might realize that it does not take 200 years to grow a thrifty forest or even start one. In fact, it might be a reminder to all of our Congressional delegation, including Metcalf and Mansfield, that we have millions of acres of forest lands in need of cultural work but no funds or organization to do the job

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1/ A copy of these pictures is in the Division of Information and Education, Regional Office, Region 1.

2/ Will be rephotographed in 1972.

adequately. How unjust to those who served from the 1920's until the 50's, as well as present employees, that Congress has been petitioned on a number of occasions to provide for better forestry on the National Forests. I make reference to the Capper report of 1921, the Copeland report of 1933, when the Forest Service reported all of their needs for cultural activities on the lands under their jurisdiction. Yet, throughout the years, Congress has taken little recognition of the fact. I hope that the present situation will not result in just another Congressional report that will be disregarded as were the needs that were expressed in the Capper and Copeland report.

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